Deliver Us from Evil or the Evil One? A Theological and Historical Analysis of the Lord's Prayer's Closing Petition

Douglas C. Youvan

doug@youvan.com

October 26, 2024

The closing petition of the Lord's Prayer—whether rendered as "deliver us from evil" or "deliver us from the evil one"—holds a profound place in Christian worship and theology. This study explores the nuanced difference between the two interpretations, tracing their linguistic origins, theological implications, and influence on Christian practice. The Greek phrase **τοῦ πονηροῦ** in Matthew 6:13 can be interpreted broadly as "evil" or specifically as "the evil one," referring to Satan. Through an analysis of historical translations, from the Latin Vulgate to the King James Version and modern renditions like the NIV and ESV, this paper reveals how each interpretation impacts Christian views on sin, suffering, and spiritual warfare. By examining perspectives from early church fathers and contemporary scholarship, we highlight how this closing line serves as a timeless call for divine protection that resonates across generations and denominations, inviting believers into a deeper understanding of their dependence on God.

Keywords: Lord's Prayer, theology, deliver us from evil, the evil one, Satan, Christian worship, New Testament, Greek translation, spiritual warfare, early church fathers, biblical interpretation. 36 pages.

Introduction

The Lord's Prayer, also known as the "Our Father," is one of the most universally recognized prayers within Christianity. Found in the Gospels of **Matthew** (6:9-13) and **Luke** (11:2-4), this prayer was taught by Jesus himself as a model for how his followers should pray. Over the centuries, it has become a cornerstone of Christian liturgy and personal devotion, prayed by millions worldwide in both public worship settings and private moments of reflection. Its enduring popularity across denominations, languages, and cultural contexts highlights the profound simplicity and universal appeal embedded in each line.

The Lord's Prayer encompasses central themes of Christian spirituality: the reverence of God's name, the coming of God's kingdom, the provision for daily needs, forgiveness, and divine protection. The final petition, often rendered in English as "deliver us from evil," is especially significant, as it touches on humanity's vulnerability and dependence on God for protection against harmful forces. This line has profound implications, invoking God's power to guard believers against whatever may separate them from His will and purpose. Yet, embedded within this plea lies a subtle but impactful linguistic question that has shaped centuries of interpretation: does this prayer ask for deliverance from "evil" as a general concept or from "the evil one," a direct reference to Satan?

This distinction between "evil" and "the evil one" arises from the original Greek phrase **τοῦ πονηροῦ** (tou ponērou), which can be interpreted either way. In some Christian traditions and Bible translations, the phrase is rendered as "deliver us from evil," a broad plea encompassing protection from all forms of sin, suffering, and moral wrongdoing. In other translations, it is more pointedly translated as "deliver us from the evil one," suggesting a personal adversary, often understood to be Satan, who actively seeks to harm or tempt believers. This subtle difference raises significant theological and spiritual questions about the nature of evil and the Christian understanding of God's protection.

The focus of this paper is to explore the nuanced implications of this translation choice in the final line of the Lord's Prayer. By examining the theological, historical, and linguistic contexts of this phrase, we seek to understand how each interpretation shapes the meaning of the prayer and its significance for Christian spirituality. To do so, we will investigate the early use of the Lord's Prayer in

Christian worship, the perspectives of early church fathers, the influence of key Bible translations, and the contemporary relevance of both “evil” and “the evil one” in different Christian traditions.

The purpose of this exploration is not only to clarify the origins of this interpretative choice but also to highlight its ongoing impact on Christian thought and practice. The choice between “evil” and “the evil one” affects how believers understand their relationship with God, their conception of spiritual protection, and the very nature of the adversities they face in life. By understanding this subtle distinction, we gain insight into the rich layers of meaning that the Lord’s Prayer offers, revealing how a seemingly small translation decision can deepen our grasp of God’s role as protector and guide in the Christian journey.

Through this analysis, we aim to uncover the multidimensional nature of this final petition, recognizing its flexibility to encompass both broad and specific interpretations of evil. In doing so, we hope to show that the Lord’s Prayer speaks powerfully to the complexities of faith, embodying both a timeless plea for divine protection and a deeply personal trust in God’s ability to deliver His people from all that threatens their spiritual well-being.

I. Background: The Origins of the Lord’s Prayer

Historical Context

The Lord’s Prayer, also known as the "Our Father," is first recorded in the New Testament in **Matthew 6:9-13** and **Luke 11:2-4**. These two passages provide slightly different versions of the prayer, each reflecting the prayerful model Jesus gave to his disciples. In Matthew’s Gospel, the prayer appears within the **Sermon on the Mount**, where Jesus addresses a large crowd, teaching them about the nature of God’s kingdom, ethical living, and spiritual practices. Here, the prayer serves as a model for authentic, humble communication with God, contrasting with the “vain repetitions” (Matthew 6:7, KJV) of hypocrites. In this context, the Lord’s Prayer embodies a radical simplicity and sincerity, setting a standard for Christian devotion that goes beyond outward religiosity.

In Luke’s Gospel, the Lord’s Prayer is introduced differently. One of Jesus’ disciples asks, “Lord, teach us to pray, as John taught his disciples” (Luke 11:1,

ESV). This request reflects a common practice among Jewish teachers to offer specific prayers to their followers, and Jesus responds by giving his disciples a prayer that would shape Christian spirituality for centuries. This version is shorter, capturing the essence of the prayer with a focus on the core themes of honoring God, seeking His kingdom, and asking for daily sustenance, forgiveness, and protection. These two contexts—Matthew's broader sermon and Luke's direct response—show the prayer as both a public teaching and a personal tool for devotion, underscoring its adaptability for both communal worship and individual reflection.

From its earliest days, the Lord's Prayer was embraced by Christian communities as a foundational element of worship. **Early church documents**, such as the *Didache* (circa 50-70 AD), reflect the prayer's central role in Christian practice, instructing believers to recite it three times daily. This early usage highlights the prayer's importance as a unifying element, connecting believers across time and place. Whether in small gatherings, individual prayer times, or the communal recitation during the Eucharist, the Lord's Prayer became a means of anchoring Christian identity and devotion. By the **4th century**, the prayer was formally integrated into the **Eucharistic liturgy**, where it continues to hold a central place in Christian worship, particularly within Catholic, Orthodox, and Anglican traditions.

Theological Structure of the Prayer

The structure of the Lord's Prayer is simple yet profound, with each line embodying a key theological concept. The prayer begins with an **address to God as "Our Father"**, acknowledging a close, familial relationship with the divine. This opening phrase alone is a radical shift from traditional Jewish prayers, emphasizing an intimate connection between God and the individual believer while also situating the prayer within a communal context ("Our Father," rather than "My Father").

1. **Reverence for God**: "Hallowed be Thy name."
   This first petition is a declaration of God's holiness and a desire to honor His name. In asking that God's name be hallowed, believers express reverence and seek to live in ways that reflect God's character, upholding the sanctity of His name in the world.

2. **The Coming of God's Kingdom**: "Thy kingdom come."
   This line reflects a longing for the fulfillment of God's rule and the ultimate establishment of His kingdom on earth. It is both a prayer for transformation within the world and within the hearts of believers, aligning with the Christian hope for the return of Christ and the realization of justice, peace, and righteousness.

3. **Submission to God's Will**: "Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven."
   This petition calls for God's perfect will to be accomplished, bridging the gap between earthly struggles and heavenly ideals. It emphasizes submission to God's purposes and a commitment to live according to His will, even when it may be difficult or challenging.

4. **Dependence on God's Provision**: "Give us this day our daily bread."
   Here, the prayer turns to daily needs, recognizing human reliance on God for sustenance. This line echoes Old Testament references to God's provision of manna in the wilderness, highlighting a reliance on God not only for physical needs but also for spiritual nourishment.

5. **The Necessity of Forgiveness**: "And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."
   This request underscores the centrality of forgiveness in Christian life, both from God and among believers. It calls for divine mercy while also challenging believers to extend that mercy to others, reflecting Jesus' teachings on forgiveness and reconciliation.

6. **Protection from Temptation and Evil**: "And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil."
   The prayer concludes with a dual request for guidance and protection. The first part, "lead us not into temptation," acknowledges human vulnerability and asks for divine help to avoid situations that may lead to sin. The second part, "deliver us from evil," is a plea for rescue from all that threatens spiritual well-being, including sin, suffering, and potentially, a personal adversary—"the evil one." This closing line introduces the theme of spiritual warfare and human dependence on God's strength in facing the forces that seek to separate believers from Him.

Each petition within the Lord's Prayer carries theological weight, guiding believers through themes of worship, dependence, forgiveness, and protection. The final line, "deliver us from evil," is particularly significant as it addresses the concept of evil directly, making it unique among the petitions. While previous requests involve praise, provision, and reconciliation, this closing petition is a direct call for divine intervention against harmful forces. Whether understood as a broad request for deliverance from general evil or a specific plea for protection from Satan, this line adds a layer of depth to the prayer's structure. It highlights human vulnerability and the need for God's help in resisting all that opposes His will, echoing themes found throughout the New Testament, where believers are encouraged to resist temptation and remain steadfast against spiritual adversaries.

This final petition's layered meaning, centered on protection from evil, sets it apart within the prayer, inviting believers to contemplate both the nature of evil and the power of God's deliverance. As we explore this line further, we will consider how its interpretation as either "evil" or "the evil one" impacts its theological significance, revealing the depth of this simple yet profound plea for divine help.

II. Linguistic Analysis of "Evil" vs. "The Evil One"

Greek Source Texts

The phrase translated as "deliver us from evil" or "deliver us from the evil one" in the Lord's Prayer originates from the Greek phrase **τοῦ πονηροῦ** (tou ponērou), as recorded in the earliest New Testament manuscripts, particularly in **Matthew 6:13**. In Koine Greek, **τοῦ πονηροῦ** is grammatically ambiguous due to the nature of the language, allowing for multiple interpretations depending on context and theological emphasis.

1. **Ambiguity in Greek Grammar**: The Greek article **τοῦ** (tou) generally means "the" and can indicate a specific person or thing. When used with a noun, it often serves to personalize or specify the subject. The noun **πονηροῦ** (ponērou), however, can mean either "evil" in a general sense (moral or existential wrongdoing) or "the evil one" as a personal, malevolent being.

This dual meaning creates a subtle interpretive issue for translators: while "evil" can refer to a general category of sin and wrongdoing, "the evil one" implies a personal adversary, such as Satan.

2. **Interpretive Challenges**: This grammatical ambiguity is compounded by the lack of specific context in the prayer itself. Jesus does not provide any explicit clarification as to whether **τοῦ πονηροῦ** refers to a general condition of evil or to a particular being. Consequently, both interpretations are plausible. On one hand, the petition could be a broad appeal for protection from all forms of evil, encompassing sin, temptation, and harm. On the other hand, it could reflect the early Christian understanding of Satan as a real adversarial presence, against whom believers seek divine protection.

3. **Broader Scriptural Context**: In other New Testament passages, **τοῦ πονηροῦ** and similar constructions are sometimes used to refer specifically to Satan. For instance, in passages like **1 John 5:19** ("the whole world is under the control of the evil one"), the term clearly denotes a personal adversary rather than a general notion of evil. This usage provides a strong case for interpreting the phrase as "the evil one" in the Lord's Prayer, aligning it with other New Testament references to Satan as a direct threat to believers.

Translation Choices in Early Christianity

As the New Testament was translated into other languages, translators faced the challenge of preserving the layered meaning of **τοῦ πονηροῦ**. Translation choices often reflected the theological perspectives and linguistic limitations of the time, leading to varied interpretations across Christian traditions.

1. **St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate (4th Century)**: In the **4th century**, St. **Jerome** translated the Bible into Latin, producing what would become known as the **Vulgate**. In translating **τοῦ πονηροῦ** in Matthew 6:13, Jerome chose the phrase **libera nos a malo**, which translates to "deliver us from evil." In Latin, **a malo** can mean "from evil" in a general sense without necessarily specifying a personified being. Jerome's translation reflects a broad, comprehensive request for deliverance from evil in all its forms, fitting well with the Vulgate's use in communal prayer and public worship.

- **Theological Context of the Vulgate Translation**: Jerome's choice of "libera nos a malo" aligns with the theological emphasis of the Western Church at the time, which often focused on human sinfulness and the need for God's grace in overcoming evil. By translating **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as "evil" rather than "the evil one," Jerome preserved a more universal interpretation, making the prayer adaptable to different situations in which believers might seek God's protection. This choice influenced subsequent Western Christianity, as the Vulgate became the standard Bible for centuries, shaping liturgical and theological traditions across Europe.

2. **Eastern Christian Interpretations and the Emphasis on Satan**: While the Western Church, through Jerome's translation, leaned toward a general view of "evil," early **Eastern Christian interpretations** occasionally emphasized "the evil one" in their translations and theological commentaries. The **Eastern Orthodox tradition**, in particular, has a long-standing emphasis on the reality of Satan and spiritual warfare. Early Greek-speaking theologians, such as **Athanasius** and **John Chrysostom**, often interpreted **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as referring specifically to Satan, reflecting the Eastern Christian view of an active, personal adversary opposing believers.

    - **Spiritual Warfare and the "Evil One"**: In Eastern Christianity, the belief in Satan as a real and malevolent force was central to teachings on spiritual warfare. The interpretation of **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as "the evil one" aligned with an understanding of Christian life as a battle against not only internal sin but also external spiritual threats. Theological writings from Eastern Church Fathers often stress the role of Satan as a tempter and deceiver, against whom Christians must remain vigilant and prayerful. This interpretation of the Lord's Prayer, then, was not merely a plea for deliverance from abstract evil but a direct request for God's protection from Satan's influence.

3. **Other Early Translations and Variations**: The ambiguity in **τοῦ πονηροῦ** continued to present challenges in other early translations. The **Syriac Peshitta**, an early Aramaic translation of the Bible, renders the phrase in a

way that leans toward a broader interpretation, similar to the Vulgate, while the **Coptic** and **Armenian** versions are sometimes read as implying "the evil one." These variations highlight how each translation effort reflected different cultural and theological priorities, resulting in a diversity of interpretations even in the earliest Christian communities.

Summary of Linguistic and Translational Influences

The divergence in translation choices between "evil" and "the evil one" has had a lasting impact on Christian traditions. St. Jerome's Vulgate, with its "libera nos a malo" translation, set the standard in the West, leading to a liturgical and theological preference for a broader interpretation. This choice resonated with the Western Church's emphasis on general sinfulness and moral evil, establishing a foundation for subsequent English translations, including the **King James Version**.

In contrast, the Eastern Orthodox tradition, often closer to the original Greek and the early theological writings, maintained an interpretive framework that acknowledged Satan as a real, personal adversary. This view of **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as "the evil one" reinforced teachings on spiritual warfare and the believer's need for divine protection against Satan's attacks. Consequently, the Lord's Prayer in the East often carries a more specific plea for deliverance from Satan himself, rather than an abstract notion of evil.

This linguistic and interpretive ambiguity enriches the Lord's Prayer, allowing it to encompass both broad and specific understandings of evil. As a result, Christian traditions across East and West find unique, contextually resonant meanings in this closing petition, reflecting their distinct theological and cultural approaches to the nature of evil and the role of divine protection. In modern translations, both interpretations persist, with many choosing "the evil one" to reflect a closer reading of the Greek, while others retain "evil" for its liturgical familiarity and inclusivity. This diversity highlights the depth and adaptability of the Lord's Prayer, showing how one phrase can carry multiple layers of spiritual significance.

III. Historical Development and Theological Perspectives

4th-Century Adoption in Liturgical Practices

By the **4th century**, the Lord's Prayer had become deeply integrated into Christian liturgical practices, cementing its role as a foundational element of communal worship in both the **Roman (Western) and Byzantine (Eastern) rites**. The inclusion of the Lord's Prayer in the Eucharistic liturgy reflects its significance, not only as a model for personal prayer but as a collective invocation that united the faithful in expressing core theological themes of reverence, dependence, and divine protection.

1. **The Roman Rite**: In the Western Church, the Lord's Prayer was formally incorporated into the **Eucharistic liturgy** around the time of **Pope Gregory the Great** (late 6th to early 7th century), though evidence suggests it was already in use by the 4th century. The Roman tradition placed the prayer toward the end of the Eucharistic celebration, just before the breaking of the bread, where it served as a preparation for Communion. The line "deliver us from evil" became the standard phrase, reflecting the Latin Vulgate's **"libera nos a malo"** (deliver us from evil). This broad interpretation resonated with the Western Church's theological focus on general moral and existential evil, inviting believers to seek God's protection from all that could separate them from His grace.
2. **The Byzantine Rite**: In the Eastern Church, the Lord's Prayer was also integrated into the liturgy by the 4th century, particularly within the **Divine Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom** and the **Liturgy of St. Basil**. In these rites, the prayer appears toward the latter half of the Eucharistic service, following the priest's consecration of the bread and wine. Similar to the Western Church, the phrase "deliver us from evil" became the common rendering, yet the Eastern interpretation often held a more specific, personal view of evil. While "evil" was broadly understood, there was a significant theological emphasis on Satan as the personification of evil. This approach aligned with the Eastern Church's understanding of spiritual warfare, where believers were seen as actively resisting not only sin but the direct influence of Satan.

3. **Standardization Across Traditions**: The formal inclusion of the Lord's Prayer in the Eucharistic liturgies of both Western and Eastern Christianity reflects its central role as a communal expression of faith and dependence on God. The phrase "deliver us from evil" became the standard in both traditions, supported by Jerome's Latin Vulgate in the West and the Greek manuscripts in the East. This consistency across liturgies allowed the prayer to unify believers across linguistic and cultural boundaries, while the nuanced interpretations of "evil" vs. "the evil one" added layers of meaning unique to each tradition's theological priorities.

Interpretations of Early Church Fathers

The theological insights of early church fathers played a crucial role in shaping the understanding of the Lord's Prayer, particularly its concluding line. Figures like **Augustine**, **Origen**, and **John Chrysostom** offered interpretations that ranged from a broad request for deliverance from all forms of evil to a specific plea for protection from Satan's influence. These perspectives reveal the diversity of early Christian thought on the nature of evil and divine deliverance, influencing both liturgical traditions and personal devotion.

1. **Augustine of Hippo (354-430 AD)**: As one of the most influential theologians in Western Christianity, Augustine viewed the Lord's Prayer as an essential expression of Christian dependence on God. In his writings, especially in the *Enchiridion* and *Sermons on the Lord's Prayer*, Augustine interpreted "deliver us from evil" as a request for protection from both moral and existential forms of evil. He saw this petition as a recognition of human vulnerability to sin and suffering, emphasizing the need for divine grace to overcome both internal temptations and external dangers. Augustine also allowed for an interpretation that included Satan as a source of temptation, yet his primary focus was on the more general concept of evil as a force that disrupts human connection with God. For Augustine, this line underscored the believer's reliance on God's mercy to avoid sin and resist despair.
2. **Origen of Alexandria (185-254 AD)**: One of the earliest and most prolific Christian theologians, Origen's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer was detailed in his treatise *On Prayer*. Origen emphasized the spiritual

dimension of the prayer, interpreting "deliver us from evil" as a request for protection against both sin and the influence of demonic forces. In Origen's view, the "evil" mentioned in the prayer was not only a reference to general wrongdoing but also a specific plea against the temptations of the devil. Origen believed that human beings, while responsible for their own choices, were vulnerable to the influence of dark spiritual forces and needed God's intervention to resist these attacks. His interpretation leaned towards a specific view of **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as "the evil one," emphasizing the early Christian belief in Satan as an active adversary against whom believers must remain vigilant.

3. **John Chrysostom (349-407 AD)**: Known as one of the greatest preachers of the early church, Chrysostom's interpretation of the Lord's Prayer reflects the Eastern Christian emphasis on spiritual warfare. In his *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*, Chrysostom interprets "deliver us from evil" specifically as a request for deliverance from Satan, whom he saw as the primary force behind temptation and moral corruption. For Chrysostom, the Christian life was a battle against not only personal sin but also the personal influence of Satan, whom he referred to as the "wicked one" (the evil one). He emphasized the believer's need for God's help in this struggle, viewing the Lord's Prayer as a shield against spiritual attacks. Chrysostom's interpretation influenced the Byzantine liturgical tradition, where "deliver us from evil" is often understood to imply Satan's direct influence, even if not explicitly stated.

4. **Diverse Interpretations and Theological Tensions**: The varied perspectives of these church fathers highlight the tension between viewing "evil" as a general concept and seeing it as a reference to a personal adversary. Augustine's broader interpretation reflects the Western Church's focus on moral and existential evil, while Origen and Chrysostom's views align with the Eastern emphasis on the reality of Satan's influence. These differences influenced regional theological developments, contributing to the Western and Eastern churches' distinct emphases on evil and divine protection.

5. **Impact on Later Theological Thought**: The interpretations of these early church fathers shaped the theological foundations for understanding the

Lord's Prayer in both the Western and Eastern traditions. Augustine's influence permeated Western Christianity, especially within Roman Catholicism, where the prayer is often recited with a focus on general evil, while Chrysostom's views impacted Eastern Orthodox thought, reinforcing the emphasis on Satan as a specific force to be resisted. These theological foundations laid by Augustine, Origen, and Chrysostom continue to influence modern interpretations of the prayer, with each perspective offering a unique understanding of the Christian struggle against evil.

Through the perspectives of these early church fathers and the formal adoption of the Lord's Prayer into liturgical practices, the phrase "deliver us from evil" came to hold layered meanings across Christian traditions. In both the Western and Eastern churches, the Lord's Prayer became not only a collective act of worship but also a theological statement on human vulnerability, divine protection, and the nature of evil—whether seen as a broad, impersonal force or a personal adversary. This historical and theological foundation set the stage for later developments in Christian thought, influencing how believers understood the spiritual dimensions of the Lord's Prayer and their dependence on God in the face of both sin and the "evil one."

IV. Influence of Key Bible Translations

The King James Version (1611)

The **King James Version (KJV)** of the Bible, commissioned by King James I of England and first published in **1611**, became one of the most influential English Bible translations in history. The translation approach of the KJV was guided by a blend of scholarship, tradition, and accessibility. The translators worked primarily from **Hebrew and Greek texts** but were also heavily influenced by previous English translations, such as **William Tyndale's Bible** and the **Geneva Bible**, as well as the Latin Vulgate, which had been the standard Bible of the Western Church for centuries.

In the Lord's Prayer, the KJV translators chose to render the final line as "deliver us from evil," mirroring the phrase used in **St. Jerome's Latin Vulgate**, which

reads **“libera nos a malo”** (deliver us from evil). This translation choice reflects an alignment with the broader interpretation of **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as general “evil” rather than a specific entity like “the evil one” (Satan). The decision to use “evil” rather than “the evil one” resonated with the theological focus of the Western Church, which had long emphasized a universal struggle against sin, suffering, and moral corruption rather than a targeted reference to Satan as an adversary. By translating **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as “evil,” the KJV reinforced a comprehensive view of the forces from which Christians seek divine protection.

The KJV translation approach also prioritized **clarity and poetic cadence**. The phrase “deliver us from evil” offered a memorable and solemn wording that easily adapted to liturgical recitation and personal devotion. Its straightforward language allowed the Lord’s Prayer to resonate across English-speaking traditions, appealing to a broad audience while upholding the theological interpretation familiar to Western Christianity. Given that the KJV became the standard Bible for English-speaking Protestants for centuries, this phrasing influenced generations of believers, cementing the understanding of the Lord’s Prayer as a request for protection from all forms of evil.

The decision to use “deliver us from evil” rather than “the evil one” reflects a preference for a translation that was both **theologically expansive** and **linguistically accessible**. While “the evil one” could have provided a more specific interpretation, the KJV translators opted for a more general term that allowed for a universal application, aligning with the English-speaking world’s broader understanding of evil and making the prayer inclusive for various contexts of Christian life. The impact of the KJV on English-speaking Christianity is profound, as its wording of the Lord’s Prayer became ingrained in the collective memory of English-speaking congregations worldwide, setting a standard for worship and devotional practice that remains influential today.

Modern Translations and Scholarship

In the 20th century, a renewed focus on **biblical scholarship, linguistic accuracy, and theological nuance** led to the development of new Bible translations, such as the **New International Version (NIV)** and the **English Standard Version (ESV)**. These translations arose from a desire to provide a clearer understanding of the original texts, informed by advancements in biblical scholarship and access to

more ancient manuscripts. With these new translations, scholars sought to capture the nuances of the original Greek, including the ambiguity of **τοῦ πονηροῦ** in the Lord's Prayer. As a result, some modern translations chose to render the phrase as "the evil one," reflecting a closer reading of the Greek and its possible reference to a specific adversary.

1. **New International Version (NIV)**: First published in **1978** and revised in 2011, the NIV aimed to balance **accuracy, readability, and contemporary language**. In the Lord's Prayer, the NIV translators chose the phrase "deliver us from the evil one" in **Matthew 6:13**, marking a departure from the KJV's broader "deliver us from evil." This decision reflects modern scholarship's emphasis on precision, as **τοῦ πονηροῦ** can indeed imply a specific entity, often interpreted as Satan. By translating the phrase as "the evil one," the NIV highlights a theological perspective that aligns with passages elsewhere in the New Testament, where Satan is referred to as "the evil one" (e.g., 1 John 5:19). This translation choice allows the prayer to take on a more personal dimension, emphasizing the Christian's plea for protection from a specific, malevolent adversary.
2. **English Standard Version (ESV)**: Published in **2001**, the ESV took a more formal approach to translation, aiming for **word-for-word accuracy** while still preserving literary quality. In the Lord's Prayer, the ESV follows a similar choice as the NIV, rendering the phrase as "deliver us from the evil one." This decision underscores the ESV's commitment to reflecting the possible original intent of the Greek text, providing a clear interpretation that aligns with the theological view of Satan as a personal adversary. By choosing "the evil one," the ESV highlights the nature of Christian spiritual warfare, reinforcing the notion that believers are in a direct struggle against Satan and his influence.
3. **Impact of Modern Scholarship**: The shift toward "the evil one" in translations like the NIV and ESV reflects broader trends in biblical scholarship, where translators prioritize **textual accuracy and contextual understanding**. Advancements in **linguistic studies** and access to **earlier manuscripts** have enabled scholars to revisit ambiguities in the biblical text and make informed decisions that reflect a closer reading of the Greek. For

modern translators, the choice of “the evil one” aligns with an emphasis on precision and allows the prayer to address the personal dimension of spiritual conflict. This approach also resonates with theological developments in contemporary Christianity, where there is a renewed emphasis on the reality of Satan and spiritual warfare.

4. **Theological Implications of “the Evil One”**: By translating **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as “the evil one,” modern translations underscore a specific aspect of Christian theology that highlights Satan as a personal, active adversary. This interpretation shifts the focus of the prayer from a general deliverance from abstract evil to a plea for protection against the tangible threat of Satan’s influence. This theological nuance provides believers with a framework for understanding the Christian life as a journey marked by spiritual resistance against demonic forces. It reinforces the notion that God’s deliverance is not only from moral corruption but also from a personal enemy who seeks to undermine faith.
5. **Balancing Tradition and Innovation**: Despite the textual justification for “the evil one,” some English translations, such as the **New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)**, retain “deliver us from evil” in deference to the KJV’s wording. This decision reflects a balancing act between **textual precision** and **liturgical continuity**, as “deliver us from evil” remains a familiar phrase within many English-speaking Christian traditions. This choice respects the KJV’s historical influence and acknowledges the broad applicability of “evil” as an all-encompassing term. However, by including “the evil one” in footnotes or alternative readings, these translations allow for both interpretations, honoring tradition while acknowledging advances in scholarship.
6. **Contemporary Relevance**: The choice between “evil” and “the evil one” remains significant in modern Christianity, as each translation influences how believers understand the nature of divine protection. For some, “deliver us from evil” provides an inclusive plea that covers all aspects of moral, physical, and spiritual harm. For others, “deliver us from the evil one” personalizes the prayer, focusing on the active role of Satan as an adversary. This dual understanding allows the Lord’s Prayer to speak to

both traditional and contemporary Christian concerns, whether general or specific in nature.

In summary, the influence of key Bible translations has shaped the way generations of Christians understand the final petition of the Lord's Prayer. While the KJV's "deliver us from evil" established a broad and inclusive interpretation that became ingrained in English-speaking traditions, modern translations like the NIV and ESV reflect a renewed focus on "the evil one," highlighting the theological dimensions of Satan's role in Christian thought. This evolution in translation not only enriches the prayer's depth but also reflects the adaptability of the Lord's Prayer to address both timeless and evolving understandings of evil in the Christian life.

V. Theological Implications of "Evil" vs. "The Evil One"

The distinction between "deliver us from evil" and "deliver us from the evil one" in the Lord's Prayer carries deep theological implications that shape Christian perspectives on the nature of evil, sin, and spiritual resistance. Each interpretation offers a unique lens through which believers can understand their relationship with God, their spiritual journey, and their daily struggles against forces that may lead them away from a life aligned with Christ's teachings. This section explores the theological richness of both interpretations, their implications for Christian ethics and spirituality, and how they influence the concept of spiritual warfare within Christian thought.

Evil as a Broad Concept

The phrase "deliver us from evil" invites a comprehensive, universal understanding of evil, encompassing not only moral failings but also broader manifestations of harm and suffering. In this interpretation, "evil" is seen as a general force that permeates human experience, affecting individuals, communities, and the world at large. This broader view reflects a recognition of humanity's vulnerability to both internal temptations and external adversities, urging believers to seek God's guidance and protection across every dimension of life.

1. **Comprehensive Scope**: The prayer's phrase "deliver us from evil" covers a wide range of challenges and threats that believers face, from personal sins and moral weaknesses to societal injustice, physical harm, and existential suffering. This view aligns with the Christian understanding that evil is not limited to individual acts of sin but is also present in systemic injustices, natural calamities, and even mental and emotional struggles. In this interpretation, the prayer functions as a call for divine protection against all that may harm believers, whether it be temptation, illness, violence, or despair.
2. **Implications for Christian Ethics**: When understood broadly, "deliver us from evil" encourages believers to live in a way that actively opposes all forms of evil in the world. It promotes a holistic Christian ethic that goes beyond avoiding sin to encompass a commitment to fight against any injustice, suffering, or harm that affects others. This interpretation supports a sense of responsibility to act as instruments of God's peace and justice, responding to evil not only through personal morality but also through efforts to address societal wrongs. It aligns with the biblical call to "love your neighbor" and "do justice" (Micah 6:8), as it implies a shared duty to confront evil wherever it manifests.
3. **Spiritual and Psychological Dimensions**: The broader interpretation of "evil" allows the prayer to address both spiritual and psychological aspects of life. Evil is seen not only as an external threat but also as something within individuals that can corrupt thoughts, emotions, and intentions. This understanding acknowledges the internal struggle against sinful impulses—such as pride, greed, anger, and envy—and the need for God's help to cultivate virtues that resist these tendencies. Thus, "deliver us from evil" becomes a prayer for inner transformation, calling on God to purify hearts and minds, allowing believers to reflect Christ's love and holiness in their lives.
4. **Divine Sovereignty and Human Vulnerability**: This interpretation emphasizes God's sovereignty over all forms of evil, positioning Him as the ultimate source of protection and deliverance. By asking for deliverance from "evil" broadly, believers recognize their own vulnerability and

dependence on God's strength, a core aspect of Christian humility. This universal appeal serves as a reminder that evil, in all its forms, is ultimately powerless in the face of God's goodness, inspiring believers to trust that, despite the world's brokenness, they can find refuge and peace in God's presence.

The Evil One as a Personal Adversary

In contrast, the phrase "deliver us from the evil one" refers specifically to **Satan** as a personal adversary and aligns with the New Testament's emphasis on spiritual warfare. This interpretation underscores a more targeted understanding of evil, one that sees Satan as an active, intelligent force working against God's kingdom and seeking to lead believers astray.

1. **Alignment with New Testament Teachings**: The New Testament often presents Satan as a real, malevolent being who opposes God and targets believers. For instance, in **1 Peter 5:8**, believers are warned to be vigilant, as "your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour." Similarly, **Ephesians 6:12** speaks of spiritual warfare, noting that "we do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness." Praying for deliverance from "the evil one" aligns with this understanding, acknowledging that Christians are in a spiritual battle against Satan and his influence.
2. **Focus on Personal Resistance and Spiritual Warfare**: The reference to "the evil one" places a specific emphasis on the believer's struggle against Satan's temptations, deceptions, and influences. It calls for vigilance and a conscious effort to resist Satan's attempts to undermine faith, sow doubt, and foster sinful behaviors. This interpretation highlights the importance of spiritual discernment, encouraging believers to be alert to any thoughts, actions, or influences that may draw them away from God. In this view, the prayer functions as a call for divine assistance in maintaining spiritual purity and strength, as well as an appeal for God's intervention in moments of weakness.
3. **Theological Implications of Satan as a Personal Adversary**: Viewing Satan as a specific "evil one" underscores the reality of a personal adversary

within Christian theology. This belief in Satan's presence and power affirms the need for God's active protection and guidance in resisting demonic influences. The prayer becomes a plea for God to shield believers from Satan's attacks, reinforcing the Christian conviction that, while Satan is a powerful being, he is ultimately subject to God's authority. This understanding also instills a sense of hope, as it emphasizes that God's deliverance can overcome even the most direct forms of spiritual attack.

4. **Christian Doctrines of Deliverance and Authority**: Praying for deliverance from "the evil one" reinforces doctrines of deliverance and authority in Christ, which are central to Christian spiritual warfare. Believers are encouraged to trust in the power of Jesus, who, through his death and resurrection, has triumphed over Satan and secured victory for humanity. This interpretation calls believers to rely on Christ's strength and authority in resisting the devil, reflecting the Christian belief that Jesus's victory over Satan grants believers access to God's power for protection and perseverance.

Comparative Analysis

1. **Influence on Christian Theology**: The choice between "evil" and "the evil one" impacts Christian theology by shaping how believers conceptualize the nature of evil and their relationship to it. A general view of evil encourages a broader, all-encompassing approach to ethical living and moral vigilance, while a specific reference to Satan invites a focused awareness of spiritual opposition. Each interpretation brings unique theological insights, emphasizing different aspects of the Christian struggle against sin and harm.

2. **Ethics and Social Responsibility**: "Deliver us from evil" encourages believers to view their ethical responsibilities broadly, encompassing personal morality, social justice, and resistance to systemic sin. In contrast, "deliver us from the evil one" emphasizes individual vigilance against Satanic influence, which, while deeply personal, may place less immediate emphasis on addressing external forms of evil like social injustices or structural oppression. Thus, "evil" as a broad term fosters an ethical commitment to transform both oneself and the world, while "the evil one"

focuses on a personal spiritual relationship with God in the context of direct opposition.

3. **Impact on Spiritual Warfare**: Both interpretations contribute to the theology of spiritual warfare but do so in different ways. “Evil” as a broad concept suggests a universal, cosmic struggle in which believers seek God’s protection from all harmful forces, while “the evil one” frames the struggle as a targeted battle against Satan specifically. This latter view calls for a more direct engagement in spiritual practices aimed at resisting Satan, such as prayer, fasting, and studying scripture. It also emphasizes the believer’s role as a soldier in a larger battle between good and evil, reflecting early Christian teachings on vigilance against demonic influences.
4. **Personal and Communal Dimensions**: The broad interpretation of “evil” allows the Lord’s Prayer to be both personal and communal, as it speaks to each believer’s struggles and also resonates with the collective challenges facing the community of faith. “The evil one,” however, personalizes the prayer more explicitly, emphasizing an individual’s plea for protection from Satan. In communal worship, this interpretation may feel more specific to personal spiritual struggles, whereas “deliver us from evil” remains inclusive, addressing the shared experiences of suffering and temptation among all believers.

In summary, the theological implications of “deliver us from evil” versus “deliver us from the evil one” shape Christian views on ethics, spiritual warfare, and the nature of the believer’s relationship with God. Both interpretations invite believers into a life of vigilance, reliance on God’s protection, and commitment to resisting all that opposes God’s will, but they do so with distinct nuances that enrich the Lord’s Prayer’s spiritual depth and adaptability across Christian traditions.

VI. Impact on Christian Worship and Practice

The Lord’s Prayer, with its phrase “deliver us from evil,” has played a central role in Christian worship for centuries, deeply embedded in both liturgical and personal prayer practices. The nuanced difference between “deliver us from evil”

and “deliver us from the evil one” impacts how Christians understand their spiritual challenges, the nature of divine protection, and the adversities they face. This section explores how these different interpretations have influenced Christian worship, how they shape both personal and communal prayer, and how each remains relevant in contemporary Christian practice.

Liturgical Continuity and Memorization

The phrase “deliver us from evil” has been part of Christian liturgy since the 4th century, deeply ingrained in the language and rhythm of worship across many denominations. When the **Latin Vulgate** translation by St. Jerome rendered the phrase as **libera nos a malo** (“deliver us from evil”), it established a tradition that carried over into Western Christianity, influencing centuries of liturgical use. Subsequent translations, including the **King James Version (KJV)**, retained this wording, which became the standard phrase for English-speaking Christians and was incorporated into liturgical practices worldwide.

1. **Ingrained in Worship and Memory**: The phrase “deliver us from evil” is woven into the fabric of Christian worship, recited communally in settings from Catholic Mass to Protestant services. This phrase has been memorized by generations, making it part of the collective consciousness of Christian prayer. Its familiarity has a powerful impact on worship, as any change in wording could disrupt the continuity and unity felt in communal recitation. For many Christians, the Lord’s Prayer in its traditional form serves as a spiritual anchor, evoking a sense of connection with past generations of believers who prayed the same words.
2. **Role of Communal Worship**: In communal worship, “deliver us from evil” reinforces a collective sense of dependence on God for protection against general threats and challenges. This broad phrasing allows each individual in the congregation to connect personally with the prayer while still engaging in a shared experience of worship. As a result, the traditional wording resonates with all members of the community, encompassing individual struggles within a communal plea for God’s deliverance. This inclusivity is one of the strengths of “deliver us from evil,” as it allows the phrase to carry a universal appeal that can be applied to all forms of sin, temptation, suffering, and harm.

3. **Resistance to Change**: Given its longstanding place in Christian worship, changing the phrase “deliver us from evil” to “deliver us from the evil one” would be challenging for many denominations. Any alteration might disrupt the unity of the prayer, as “deliver us from evil” has become an essential element of Christian tradition. Churches and congregants are often resistant to changing wording that is so deeply rooted in liturgy, as it would not only require adaptation but might also feel as though the sacred continuity of the prayer were being broken. This resistance reflects the value placed on maintaining liturgical consistency, especially in traditions where the Lord’s Prayer serves as a central act of communal worship.

Personal and Communal Prayer

The subtle differences between “deliver us from evil” and “deliver us from the evil one” impact personal spirituality and the way Christians approach both individual and communal prayer. Each phrasing offers a unique focus, shaping how believers understand the nature of their spiritual challenges and their dependence on God’s protection.

1. **“Deliver Us from Evil”**: The broader phrase encourages believers to seek God’s protection against all forms of harm and wrongdoing, both internal and external. In personal prayer, this phrasing resonates with individuals who face a variety of adversities—whether these are struggles with personal sin, emotional or mental suffering, or societal injustices. It allows each person to bring their unique challenges to God, seeing Him as a source of refuge and strength against every kind of evil. This interpretation also invites believers to reflect on the broader concept of evil within themselves and the world, urging them to seek purity, justice, and wholeness in all aspects of life.
    - **Communal Application**: In a communal context, “deliver us from evil” brings the congregation together in a shared plea, highlighting the collective need for God’s protection in a world fraught with trials and temptations. It enables the church to pray as one body, acknowledging a universal vulnerability to evil and affirming a shared desire for God’s deliverance. This general interpretation is particularly suitable for public worship, as it allows each individual to

apply the prayer to their own life while participating in the collective voice of the community.

2. **"Deliver Us from the Evil One"**: The specific reference to "the evil one" directs believers' attention to Satan as a personal adversary. In personal prayer, this phrasing encourages a heightened awareness of spiritual warfare, acknowledging Satan's role as a tempter and deceiver who actively seeks to undermine faith. Believers who pray to be delivered from "the evil one" may find themselves more attuned to resisting specific temptations and guarding their thoughts and actions against Satan's influence. This phrasing reinforces the idea of a personal struggle against demonic forces, reminding Christians that God's protection is essential in resisting a real and powerful enemy.
    - **Communal Application**: In communal worship, "deliver us from the evil one" can serve as a reminder of the shared spiritual battle Christians face against Satan and his influence in the world. This specific interpretation encourages solidarity among believers, as they recognize a common adversary and express a unified desire for God's help in resisting him. It can inspire the congregation to adopt a proactive stance against sin and temptation, emphasizing the importance of vigilance, prayer, and reliance on God's power to overcome the devil's schemes.

Modern Relevance and Diverse Interpretations

In contemporary Christian practice, both "deliver us from evil" and "deliver us from the evil one" hold relevance, offering believers flexibility in addressing a range of spiritual challenges. Each interpretation speaks to different aspects of faith, allowing Christians to choose a focus that resonates with their personal experiences and theological perspectives.

1. **Addressing General Moral Evil**: For many believers, "deliver us from evil" provides a broad and inclusive framework for prayer, suitable for addressing the various forms of moral evil that exist in today's world. It is particularly relevant for Christians concerned with social justice, as it encompasses issues like inequality, oppression, violence, and corruption. This phrasing invites Christians to consider how they can confront evil in all

its forms, whether through personal transformation, community service, or advocacy for positive change. In a world facing complex social and moral issues, “deliver us from evil” remains a powerful and adaptable prayer that invites believers to align their lives with God’s will for justice and mercy.

2. **Resisting Specific Spiritual Forces**: The phrase “deliver us from the evil one” resonates with Christians who experience faith as a struggle against personal and spiritual adversaries. In recent decades, there has been a renewed emphasis on spiritual warfare within many Christian circles, particularly in evangelical and charismatic traditions. For believers who view Satan as an active and immediate threat, “the evil one” underscores the importance of relying on God to resist his temptations and attacks. This interpretation can be particularly meaningful for those who feel targeted by specific trials or who sense the presence of spiritual conflict in their lives, offering them a direct way to ask for God’s intervention and strength.
3. **Flexibility in Personal Application**: The dual interpretations of the Lord’s Prayer allow for a wide range of applications in personal spirituality, meeting the diverse needs of modern believers. Some may turn to “deliver us from evil” as a reminder of God’s sovereignty over all forms of suffering and sin, while others may find comfort in “deliver us from the evil one” as a reassurance of God’s protection against a specific adversary. This flexibility enables the Lord’s Prayer to remain deeply relevant across denominations, cultures, and individual experiences, as believers interpret the final petition in a way that speaks directly to their unique context.
4. **Contemporary Emphasis on Spiritual Warfare and Ethics**: Modern Christian practice often incorporates both interpretations, emphasizing both a general opposition to evil and a specific resistance against Satan. In this sense, the Lord’s Prayer offers a theological foundation for Christian ethics, while also equipping believers for the personal challenges of spiritual warfare. By combining these dimensions, contemporary Christians can draw on the Lord’s Prayer as a resource for addressing both the moral complexities of the world and their own spiritual battles.

In summary, the difference between “deliver us from evil” and “deliver us from the evil one” reflects a spectrum of theological, ethical, and spiritual emphases

that influence how Christians approach worship and daily life. The broad interpretation invites believers to confront evil in all its forms, fostering a communal commitment to justice, peace, and righteousness. Meanwhile, the specific reference to "the evil one" offers a focused understanding of spiritual warfare, highlighting the need for divine protection against a personal adversary. Together, these interpretations enrich Christian worship and practice, allowing the Lord's Prayer to speak profoundly to believers across different eras, cultures, and spiritual needs.

VII. Conclusion

The closing petition of the Lord's Prayer, whether understood as "deliver us from evil" or "deliver us from the evil one," has undergone a fascinating linguistic, theological, and historical evolution. From its earliest origins in the Greek manuscripts of the New Testament, the ambiguity of the phrase **τοῦ πονηροῦ** has presented translators and theologians with a choice between a broad, inclusive appeal to be delivered from all forms of evil, and a specific plea for protection from Satan as a personal adversary. This interpretive journey has been influenced by linguistic nuances, theological priorities, and the differing perspectives of key figures and church traditions, each contributing to a richer understanding of the prayer's spiritual depth.

Historically, the decision to translate **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as "evil" in the **Latin Vulgate** set a standard that would define much of Western Christianity's approach to this phrase. St. Jerome's translation of the phrase as **libera nos a malo** created a broad and flexible interpretation that allowed believers to see "evil" as encompassing personal sin, social injustice, and all forms of suffering. The Vulgate's influence continued into the English-speaking world with the **King James Version (KJV)**, which solidified "deliver us from evil" as the traditional rendering of the prayer's final petition. This broad phrasing became a foundational part of Christian worship and personal devotion, inviting believers across centuries and cultures to see God as a protector against all manifestations of evil.

In contrast, modern scholarship, with access to a more nuanced understanding of the original Greek, has led some recent translations—such as the **New**

International Version (NIV) and the **English Standard Version (ESV)**—to render the phrase as "deliver us from the evil one." This specific reference to Satan brings a renewed focus on spiritual warfare and the personal struggle against demonic forces. It aligns with New Testament teachings that depict Satan as an active force opposing God's kingdom and targeting believers. This interpretation has gained prominence in contemporary Christian practice, especially within denominations that emphasize spiritual warfare, and offers believers a focused understanding of evil as a personal adversary that requires vigilance and divine intervention.

Both interpretations—"evil" and "the evil one"—carry significant spiritual depth, offering Christians a **multi-layered approach to prayer** that adapts to diverse contexts and personal needs. The choice between these phrases is not merely a matter of linguistic precision; it reflects two complementary dimensions of the Christian experience. "Deliver us from evil" encourages a universal perspective, encompassing all forms of harm, sin, and suffering that affect believers, while "deliver us from the evil one" brings a particular focus on the believer's resistance to Satan as an active adversary. Together, these interpretations remind Christians of the breadth and depth of God's protection, addressing both general and specific spiritual challenges.

This dual meaning enriches Christian spirituality by allowing the Lord's Prayer to resonate across generations, cultures, and denominations as a **timeless plea for God's guidance and protection**. The universality of "deliver us from evil" enables it to speak to believers facing a wide range of moral, emotional, and physical struggles, while "the evil one" offers a focused prayer for those experiencing acute spiritual trials or temptations. This flexibility of interpretation allows the Lord's Prayer to meet the needs of individuals and communities in various life circumstances, from daily struggles to moments of intense spiritual conflict.

In essence, the closing petition of the Lord's Prayer embodies a profound theological richness that enhances its role as a central element of Christian worship and personal devotion. Its layered meanings invite believers to approach God with humility and trust, seeking protection from both the broad spectrum of evil in the world and the specific threats posed by spiritual forces. This dual approach fosters a more complete understanding of Christian life as both an

ethical journey toward holiness and a spiritual struggle requiring divine assistance.

The enduring relevance of this prayer reflects the adaptability of its message, offering believers a source of comfort, strength, and guidance that transcends historical and cultural boundaries. As Christians continue to recite this prayer, they participate in a tradition that spans centuries, one that unites them with believers from all backgrounds in a shared expression of faith. The prayer's final petition remains a profound reminder of humanity's need for God's protection in a world filled with trials, offering a timeless call to depend on God's goodness in resisting all that separates us from Him.

Appendix: Textual Comparisons and Interpretations

This appendix provides a side-by-side comparison of the Lord's Prayer in several major translations, highlighting the final petition. Each version reflects a unique translation choice for the phrase **τοῦ πονηροῦ** ("from evil" or "from the evil one") and offers insight into the theological and linguistic decisions that have shaped Christian understanding of this prayer. Brief notes follow each version to elucidate how the translation choices impact the interpretation of the Lord's Prayer.

---

1. Greek (Original Text - Matthew 6:9-13)

Ἡ Κυριακὴ Προσευχή (The Lord's Prayer in Greek)

Πάτερ ἡμῶν ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς,

ἁγιασθήτω τὸ ὄνομά σου.

ἐλθέτω ἡ βασιλεία σου,

γενηθήτω τὸ θέλημά σου,

ὡς ἐν οὐρανῷ καὶ ἐπὶ γῆς.

τὸν ἄρτον ἡμῶν τὸν ἐπιούσιον δὸς ἡμῖν σήμερον,

καὶ ἄφες ἡμῖν τὰ ὀφειλήματα ἡμῶν,

ὡς καὶ ἡμεῖς ἀφίεμεν τοῖς ὀφειλέταις ἡμῶν.

καὶ μὴ εἰσενέγκῃς ἡμᾶς εἰς πειρασμόν,

ἀλλὰ ῥῦσαι ἡμᾶς ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ.

- **Translation Note**: The phrase **ἀπὸ τοῦ πονηροῦ** (apo tou ponērou) is grammatically ambiguous. It can be rendered as “from evil” (broad, general evil) or “from the evil one” (specific reference to Satan). The definite article **τοῦ** ("the") allows for either interpretation depending on the translator’s emphasis on general or personal evil.

---

2. Latin Vulgate (4th Century - St. Jerome)

Pater Noster (The Lord’s Prayer in Latin)

Pater noster, qui es in caelis,

sanctificetur nomen tuum.

Adveniat regnum tuum.

Fiat voluntas tua,

sicut in caelo, et in terra.

Panem nostrum quotidianum da nobis hodie,

et dimitte nobis debita nostra,

sicut et nos dimittimus debitoribus nostris.

Et ne nos inducas in tentationem,

sed libera nos a malo.

- **Translation Note**: St. Jerome’s Latin translation uses **a malo** (“from evil”), opting for a general rendering rather than a specific reference to “the evil one.” This choice set a precedent for the Western Church, emphasizing a comprehensive view of evil encompassing sin, suffering, and worldly corruption, rather than a focus on Satan as a personal adversary.

---

3. King James Version (1611)

The Lord's Prayer in English (KJV)

Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done,

in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from evil.

For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, forever. Amen.

- **Translation Note**: The KJV follows the Latin Vulgate in using "deliver us from evil," thus reinforcing a broad interpretation. This wording emphasizes a general plea for protection from all forms of harm, temptation, and sin. It has become the most traditional English phrasing, deeply embedded in the liturgy and worship practices of many Christian denominations.

---

4. New International Version (NIV - 1978, 2011 Update)

The Lord's Prayer in English (NIV)

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name,

your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.

- **Translation Note**: The NIV translates **τοῦ πονηροῦ** as “the evil one,” reflecting a closer reading of the Greek and aligning with New Testament references to Satan as a personal adversary (e.g., 1 Peter 5:8, 1 John 5:19). This interpretation emphasizes a specific request for protection from Satan, resonating with traditions that highlight spiritual warfare and the Christian struggle against demonic influences.

---

5. English Standard Version (ESV - 2001)

The Lord’s Prayer in English (ESV)

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread,

and forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation,

but deliver us from the evil one.

- **Translation Note**: The ESV, like the NIV, translates the phrase as “the evil one,” focusing on the possibility that **τοῦ πονηροῦ** references Satan specifically. This choice reflects the ESV’s commitment to word-for-word accuracy and theological nuance, underscoring the interpretation of Satan

as a personal adversary. By choosing “the evil one,” the ESV aligns with an interpretation that highlights the direct conflict between Christians and demonic forces, adding a personal dimension to the petition.

---

6. New Revised Standard Version (NRSV - 1989)

The Lord’s Prayer in English (NRSV)

Our Father in heaven,

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come, your will be done,

on earth as it is in heaven.

Give us today our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from the evil one.

- **Translation Note**: The NRSV, used widely in academic and liturgical settings, opts for “the evil one” while providing a footnote that offers “evil” as an alternative interpretation. This approach allows the translation to acknowledge both readings, showing the ambiguity in the original Greek text while favoring the specific interpretation of Satan. By offering both options, the NRSV provides flexibility, catering to readers who might lean toward either the general or specific understanding of evil.

Summary of Translation Decisions for τοῦ πονηροῦ

- **Broad Interpretation (“from evil”)**: The Latin Vulgate, KJV, and other traditional translations chose the general term “evil,” encompassing a wide range of negative forces—sin, temptation, suffering, and moral corruption. This interpretation has allowed the Lord’s Prayer to remain inclusive and

universally applicable, making it adaptable to various situations and emphasizing the comprehensive nature of God's protection.

- **Specific Interpretation ("from the evil one")**: Modern translations like the NIV, ESV, and NRSV (in some readings) opt for "the evil one," aligning with passages in the New Testament that refer to Satan as a specific adversary. This choice reflects an emphasis on spiritual warfare and the direct, personal battle against Satan. It has gained popularity in denominations that stress the believer's need for divine protection against the demonic.

The differences in translation decisions reveal the nuanced layers of meaning in the Lord's Prayer, demonstrating how each phrasing—"from evil" and "from the evil one"—can significantly influence Christian theology, worship, and individual spirituality. Each version, whether broad or specific, invites believers to seek divine deliverance, reaffirming their dependence on God for protection against all that threatens their faith and well-being.

References

Augustine. *Enchiridion on Faith, Hope, and Love*. Translated by J.F. Shaw, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 1887.

Augustine. *Sermons on Selected Lessons of the New Testament*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 6, edited by Philip Schaff, Christian Literature Publishing, 1888.

Bratcher, Robert G., and Eugene A. Nida. *A Translator's Handbook on the Gospel of Matthew*. United Bible Societies, 1975.

Brown, Raymond E. *An Introduction to the New Testament*. Doubleday, 1997.

Chrysostom, John. *Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. 10, edited by Philip Schaff, Christian Literature Publishing, 1888.

Cross, F. L., and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, editors. *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. 3rd ed., Oxford University Press, 2005.

Ehrman, Bart D., and Bruce M. Metzger. *The Text of the New Testament: Its Transmission, Corruption, and Restoration*. 4th ed., Oxford University Press, 2005.

Evans, Craig A., and N.T. Wright, editors. *Dictionary of New Testament Background*. InterVarsity Press, 2000.

Greek New Testament (SBLGNT). Edited by Michael W. Holmes, Society of Biblical Literature, 2010.

Jerome, St. *The Vulgate Bible: Douay-Rheims Translation*. Translated by Gregory Martin, reprinted by Baronius Press, 2007.

KJV Bible. *The Holy Bible, King James Version*. Public Domain, 1611.

Metzger, Bruce M. *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament*. 2nd ed., German Bible Society, 2005.

New International Version Bible (NIV). *The Holy Bible, New International Version*. Biblica, 1978, 2011.

New Revised Standard Version Bible (NRSV). *The Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version*. National Council of Churches, 1989.

Origen. *On Prayer*. Translated by John J. O'Meara, Newman Press, 1954.

Porter, Stanley E., and Andrew W. Pitts. *New Testament Language and Translation*. Brill, 2010.

Schaff, Philip, editor. *The Creeds of Christendom: With a History and Critical Notes*, Vol. 1. Harper and Brothers, 1877.

Scott, Ernest F. *The Nature of Evil in Christian Thought*. Cambridge University Press, 1930.

The English Standard Version Bible (ESV). *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version*. Crossway, 2001.

The Didache: Teachings of the Apostles. Translated by Francis Brown, Christian Classics Ethereal Library, 2005.

Wallace, Daniel B. *Greek Grammar Beyond the Basics: An Exegetical Syntax of the New Testament*. Zondervan, 1996.

Wright, N.T. *The Lord and His Prayer*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1997.